

121 Much depends on the success of the policies now being advocated by the government. If these are successful in raising living standards and hold promise of yielding the wealth and power expected of them (that is, a gradual increase of wealth and power), then the direction of change observed since the war will continue to be followed. People will then be willing to make ever more drastic modifications of old ritual and finally, perhaps, the traditional conceptual system will break down in favour of a different system. On the other hand, Orokaiva are not unprepared if these promises remain unfulfilled and if living standards should actually drop again, a possibility by no means to be ruled out as the economic future of New Guinea export products is very uncertain. In that case, millennial movements, relying on traditional magical procedures, are an ever-open possibility.

179 At the present time, Orokaiva are not taking a defensive position about their abandonment of old customs, as they regard this a reasonable consequence of accepting the "new day." Nor do they act defensively when they observe traditional custom. They reinterpret such observance by means of the kind of ambiguities I have outlined.

• [154] In fact I cannot conceive of any situation in which an Orokaiva will behave defensively. I would not call their ambiguities rationalisations either: when they use terms like "birthday party" or "practise," they are not rationalising their ceremonies as part of a new Christian way of life but they are merely saying that these ceremonies are capable of bearing a second meaning, in the context of a Christian system. Upon further inquiry, the anthropologist finds that his informants can explain the original system in much detail whereas a concept such as that of a "birthday party" in the Western sense is left in a total vacuum, as the day and even the year of birth of a child is hardly noted.

Section 2: Controls Operating for and Against Continuance of Tradition

52 In an earlier chapter I described a ceremony for children about to start their new school year. It was a kind of farewell feast, 177 which certainly made the children feel that they were off to an important assignment to an alien world. But it also carried a second kind of message: that the world of the school begins outside the 859 village boundaries. When the children came back to the village (which was every night) they resumed their ordinary roles in the Orokaiva 177 scheme. The children felt no conflict of loyalties inside the village; village life had been sufficiently adapted to remove glaring inconsistencies between the rules of village and mission station. It was a little 124 different for my interpreter who had been to Martyr's School and who therefore knew various Christian concepts unfamiliar to other villagers. 177 This made him feel a little superior when he talked to me; he would tell me what "the others" believed, adding that he knew how matters